

NUTRITION

How can I use the food label to reduce the amount of fat and cholesterol in my diet?

Some of the label information, such as that about fat--particularly saturated fat--and cholesterol, will be of special interest to people concerned about high blood cholesterol and heart disease. High intakes of saturated fat and cholesterol are linked to high blood cholesterol, which in turn is linked to increased risk of coronary heart disease (CHD). CHD is the most common form of heart disease and is caused by narrowing of the arteries that feed the heart.

For the general population, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that fat intake be limited to no more than 30 percent of the day's total calorie intake. Saturated fat intake should be limited to no more than 10 percent of the day's calories. The Daily Values used in food labeling follow these same guidelines.

Thus, people eating 2,000 calories a day should limit their daily fat intake to no more than 65 grams (g). (30 percent times 2,000 calories = 600 calories divided by 9 calories/gram of fat = 65 g.) They should limit saturated fat intake to no more than 20 g a day. (10 percent times 2,000 calories = 200 calories divided by 9 calories/gram of fat = 20 g.)

The 2,000-calorie level is the basis on which Percent Daily Values on the label are calculated. This level was chosen partly because it is a "user-friendly" number that allows for easy adjustments in Daily Value numbers, if consumers want to figure them to their own diet and calorie intakes. Prevention Partners has a "Low-Fat Food Finder Slideguide" that can be purchased for \$.75. The order forms are located on Prevention Partners web page at www.eip.sc.gov.

The Daily Value for cholesterol is 300 milligrams (mg). It remains the same whatever the person's calorie intake. People with severe high blood cholesterol levels or heart disease may need to limit their total fat, saturated fat and cholesterol intakes even further.

The place to look for whether a food is relatively high or low in a nutrient is the Percent Daily Value column on the Nutrition Facts panel, usually on the side or back of the food package

If, for individual foods, the Percent Daily Value is 5 or less, the food is generally considered low in that nutrient. The more foods chosen that have a Percent Daily Value of 5 or less for fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium, the easier it is to eat a healthier daily diet. Foods with 10 percent or more of the Daily Value for fiber are considered good sources of that dietary component. The overall goal should be to select foods that together do not exceed 100% of the Daily Value for fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium, but that will meet or exceed 100% for other nutrients (like calcium, vitamin A and vitamin C).

Please visit <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/qa-top.html> to learn more about how to use the Nutrition Fact Panel.

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration

